Water Conservation Committee Recommendation

Advance Michigan's Water Conservation and Efficiency Efforts through State Climate, Energy, and Water Infrastructure Initiatives

Synopsis: Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer recently ordered EGLE's Office of Climate and Energy to coordinate the state's efforts to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 through development and implementation of the Mi Healthy Climate Plan, outlined in Executive Order 2020-182 and Directive 2020-10. The creation of the MI Healthy Climate Plan, a comprehensive plan meant to protect public health and the environment while helping to develop new clean energy jobs by making Michigan fully carbon-neutral by 2050 provides an opportunity to bring water squarely into the energy conversation.

In addition, the state's MI Clean Water Plan is investing $500 million in Michigan's aging water infrastructure particularly in disadvantaged communities which presents an opportunity to improve drinking and wastewater infrastructure, expand green infrastructure, address water loss through leaky systems, and educate the public about water and energy efficiency and conservation. These initiatives along with EGLE's new organizational structure including the environment, Great Lakes and energy presents an opportunity to create a greater focus on advancing Michigan's water conservation and efficiency goals and objectives under the Great Lakes Compact through strategic integration into Michigan's goals to achieve a carbon neutral footprint by 2050 to address climate change, increase energy efficiency, improve aging infrastructure, and protect the environment and public health.

New technological advancements have also occurred within the various water sectors that need to be considered which can provide insight into potential water, energy, and infrastructure savings for all water user groups. Michigan should more intentionally utilize existing and new climate, energy, and water infrastructure programs and initiatives to help achieve its water conservation goals and objectives and to ensure users have the best available information, tools, and technologies to engage in activities to improve efficiency and conservation of water resources and ensure sustainable water resources. Specifically, Michigan should:

- Identify gaps and opportunities to strategically integrate water conservation and efficiency into current and future climate, energy and water infrastructure policies and programs.
- Develop knowledge of best practices and cutting-edge technological innovations for water conservation and efficiency for different water user (residential, agricultural, commercial, institutional, and industrial user groups).
- Identify programs to promote education, outreach and technical assistance to different user sectors (residential, agricultural, commercial, institutional, and industrial user sectors).

Desired Outcomes:

- Water users have the best available information, tools, and technologies to engage in activities to improve efficiency and conservation of water resources to ensure sustainable water resources.

Recommended Action: The Water Conservation Committee recommends that a subcommittee of multiple stakeholders be established under the WUAC to develop recommendations to

strategically integrate water conservation and efficiency into Michigan's new and existing climate, energy and water infrastructure policies and programs. Stakeholders should include representatives from state and local units of government, agriculture, water suppliers, academia, business and industry. The subcommittee should:

- Conduct an assessment of the state of Michigan's current climate, energy, sustainability and water infrastructure policies and programs to identify current and future opportunities where water conservation and efficiency efforts may be incorporated.
- Identify gaps and opportunities to strategically integrate water conservation and efficiency into future policies and programs.
- Identify technological advancements to incorporate into water conservation and efficiency practices.
- Assess the EPA Watersense Program and other water rich state water conservation and efficiency programs including education and outreach initiatives targeting major water sectors (for example: the Minnesota Water Conservation Program).
- Identify specific innovative opportunities to improve Michigan's Water Conservation and Efficiency Program by building connections between current and new policies and programs, technological innovations, and promote education and outreach to different user sectors.

Cost Analysis and Funding Recommendation: – Approximately $50,000 to issue a competitive funding opportunity to hire a consultant to conduct the assessment of Michigan's current climate, energy, sustainability and water infrastructure policies and programs; identify gaps and opportunities to strategically integrate water conservation and efficiency into future policies and programs; assess successful federal programs and other water rich state water conservation and efficiency programs, and make policy and program recommendations to improve Michigan's Water Conservation and Efficiency Program.

The Office of the Great Lakes (OGL) is also submitting a project proposal through the University of Michigan Graham Sustainability Institute Dow Sustainability Fellows program for a multidisciplinary team of graduate students to conduct an assessment of current state policies, programs, and projects to address climate change, energy and water infrastructure and make policy and program recommendations to more strategically integrate water conservation and efficiency. If selected by the Dow Sustainability Fellows program, funding for the master's team is provided by the Fellows program.

Implementing organization: This recommendation would require the WUAC to create a new committee, identify a chair, EGLE and MDARD staff time to convene the stakeholder group, develop funding opportunity, and/or serve as advisors to the Dow Sustainability Fellows Masters project team participate in the discussion.

Legislative changes, if applicable – none at this time

Timeframe: Approximately 12 months